

tioners with about 15% of their elderly population taking hypnotic drugs regularly.

The author is not a medical man but has carefully researched the two fields of sleep research and social gerontology. He starts well with a chapter on the history of sleep research and we are taken through age related changes, factors upsetting sleep in the elderly to the use of hypnotic drugs and possible alternatives. However, the chapter on dreams is superfluous and difficult to treat well in such a book. Drug dependence is recognized but no account given of how we can detect the patient likely to become dependent.

The book is well referenced and could be a good starting point for future researchers. Moreover, it is delightfully short and should not daunt even the busiest general practitioner, to whom it is quite definitely relevant.

ANTHONY D. CLIFT  
*General Practitioner, Manchester*

### WHY ARE WE WAITING?

**An analysis of hospital waiting lists**

*John Yates*

*Oxford University Press (1987)*

*90 pages. Price £3.95*

This is a slim paperback printed on poor paper which provides an easily readable and accessible account of waiting lists in the National Health Service, the nature of the problem and possible solutions. The author makes no secret of his political position which is against private practice: this is helpful and in no way diminishes his analysis. He was a member of the working party which produced the Duthie report and is well informed and has thought a lot about the problem. It is quite clear that solutions are political in the widest sense and unlikely to be implemented, at least in the short term.

Anyone, lay or medical, even peripherally interested in NHS waiting lists, would enjoy and benefit from reading this small book.

JAMES MCCORMICK  
*Professor of Community Health, University of Dublin*

### HEALTH AND ILLNESS: THE LAY PERSPECTIVE

*Michael Calnan*

*Tavistock Publications, London (1987)*

*198 pages. Price £7.95*

Based on an original sociological study this book aims to illustrate the beliefs and behaviour that people in this country have about health and illness. Questions were asked, such as: 'How much do you value health compared to certain other things?', 'What does being healthy actually mean, in your experience?', 'How far do you feel that your health is in your own control?...your own responsibility?' and, since the study was also about illness, 'What does illness mean to you?', 'When would you decide to seek help?'

The gaps which can exist between how doctors think and how people in general think (or indeed doctors when they suffer illness themselves) are a topical focus of interest and concern. So too are the differences in the words used by professionals and other people to express such thoughts. There is therefore no doubt about the importance of this subject for doctors.

But was this book written for them? There is little to suggest that it was. Although it is inherently difficult to write about the nature of health and illness, there could have been more help for the ordinary reader in the form of timely signposts to the direction of the argument or in discarding words which may be familiar to sociologists but not to others.

For those who are prepared to make a sustained effort, *Health and illness: the lay perspective* contains valuable material, not

least in the transcripts of what people say about their own experience, beliefs and motives for action. There are, for example, differences in the statements of people whose lives have been less or more privileged and fortunate. There are, for another example, clues to suggest why prevention and health maintenance are resisted. The need to enter the other person's thinking, if you want them to go along with you, becomes very obvious.

A thoughtful book, but hard to read.

JOHN HORDER  
*General Practitioner, London*

### BRITISH ASIANS HEALTH IN THE COMMUNITY

**Topics in community health series**

*Patience Karseras and Eirwen J. Hopkins*

*John Wiley and Sons, Chichester (1987)*

*144 pages. Price £6.50*

The preface states the premiss on which this book is based: 'that the racism experienced by ethnic minorities in the delivery of health care stems more from the ignorance of practitioners than from prejudice'. It is written by two health visitors and targeted towards community nurses, social workers and others in the field of community care. Although weighted towards pregnancy, childbirth and infancy, the book gives a good outline of the cultures from which Asians in Britain come, and some of the problems they face in this country.

The authors tackle our ignorance on several fronts. A clear account of Moslem, Hindu and Sikh naming is given, thus preventing us from committing such semantic atrocities as 'Mrs Begum'. Differences in language are also discussed, for example the lack of words for 'please' and 'thank you' in some Asian languages, which can lead to a false impression of rudeness when translated. Although the book is strongly focused on physical health, the authors do touch on attitudes towards mental illness, and the tendency for depression in Asian women to present with somatic symptoms.

This is a book which could usefully be shared between all members of the primary health care team. As well as informing, it will also encourage us to examine our attitudes towards our ethnic minority patients.

ANDREW WILSON  
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### PROGRESS IN CHILD HEALTH

**Volume 3**

*J.A. Macfarlane (Ed)*

*Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh (1987)*

*237 pages. Price £20.00*

*Progress in child health* satisfies its aims to present up-to-date summaries of issues in the care of children. The editor is to be congratulated on producing a third volume in a relatively short time and the range of authors continues to give a broad perspective to the subject area.

In this volume, the topics covered are primarily the concern of general practitioners and community paediatricians, with a strong leaning towards preventive child care. Inevitably, some chapters are stronger than others but it is a book worth dipping into. With preventive medicine becoming an increasing part of general practice, the chapters on screening for congenital dislocation of the hip, visual defects in children and immunization are particularly relevant.

There is something for everyone in this book. It is reasonably priced and with the rapid changes in medical care this series is one which is likely to run and run.

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